

## Unusual Plant Thrives atop Redstone's Bluffs

High above the Tennessee River sits one of only 11 known populations of a rare plant, *Eriogonum longifolium* var. *harperi*. Commonly known as Harper's Umbrella Plant or Harper's Buckwheat, it was once considered a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Changes in nomenclature have resulted in the designation being amended to a federal "Species of Concern" but it may very well be listed as an endangered or threatened species in the future pending further research.

Harper's umbrella plant is found on thin soils of limestone glades or bluffs. It generally requires full sunlight but may tolerate light shading from a few over story trees. The Redstone population is comprised of several hundred individuals and is the only population in Alabama that occurs on a bluff.



Redstone's environmental office, in cooperation with the Alabama Natural Heritage Program has been monitoring the population of Harper's buckwheat since 1997. The primary threats to *Eriogonum longifolium* var. *harperi* is loss of habitat and shading and encroachment by exotic plant species. Over the last several years natural resource personnel, with the help of boy scouts and volunteers, have worked to remove weedy competitors such as Japanese honeysuckle.

The site is located in front of one of Redstone's recreational facilities known as the Rustic Lodge. The area is generally used for parties, meetings, and conferences making it an ideal opportunity to increase public awareness about this interesting plant. The area around the plants has been fenced off and educational signs about the plant's life history and ecology have been placed on the patio in front on the Rustic Lodge. Additionally, personnel operating the Rustic Lodge are aware of the plants and have agreed to cooperate in a conservation program. Various restrictions for the Eriogonum habitat have



been incorporated into the rental agreement for the lodge. There are to be no activities for foot traffic downhill of the boundary rope. No cutting of any woody vegetation without on site prior approval from the environmental office. No deposition of soil or woody debris is allowed, nor may plants of any kind be planted or seeded in the habitat area. Under the Garrison's management, the Eriogonum is thriving with over 500 plants growing on and near the bluff and will hopefully continue to do so for generations to come.